

# Teaching in Foreign Languages at the Interface of Business Disciplines

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**Presenter Symposium**

**CURRICULUM AT THE INTERFACE: THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**AREA AND COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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**Potential Sponsor Divisions:** Management Education and Development, International Management, and the Social Issues in Management Divisions.

*The Symposium organizers, Mette Zølner and Charles T. Tackney, have received the statements from all intended participants agreeing to participate in the entire Symposium and stating that they are not in violation of the Rule of Three + Three.*

**(We request consideration for MED Best Symposium in Management Education and Development Award.)**

**Presentation Titles and Presenters:****1. Teaching the EU using plurilingual content based teaching and cooperative learning**

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**2. At the interface of disciplines: Interdisciplinarity as a driver of curriculum innovation**

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**3. Rigor AND relevance: Challenges of Master thesis writing at the Copenhagen Business School**

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**4. Institutional Entrepreneurs and Curriculum Innovation**

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**5. Insight-based critical realism: a Trans-cultural Epistemology for a European Higher Education Area**

Charles T. Tackney, Ph.D.

**6. Teaching in foreign languages at the interface of business disciplines**

Mette Zølner, Ph.D.

## Teaching in foreign languages at the interface of business disciplines

Mette Zølner

Within the European higher education area several educational programs aim at combining proficiency in foreign languages with competences in business and management.<sup>5</sup> There is a large variety among these programs; some are BAs/MAs, whereas others are BSc/MSc; and some are located at universities, while others are anchored within business schools. However, all these degrees share similar objectives of providing their graduates with language proficiency and cultural skills that respond to needs in international and global business. In other words, the reason for teaching language skills is to provide graduates with competences required for their careers within business, in opposition to language teaching in disciplines within humanities, where a language is rather taught for the its own sake and/or with a view of teaching it later. Hence, within these combination programs the teaching of languages takes place at the interface of traditional business school disciplines (i.e. business administration, management, economics, and accounting).

This Symposium presentation and paper proposes to explore experiences of teaching in educational programs that combine foreign languages with business and management in a European context. This is interesting since these programs primarily are conceived in relation to needs that occurred with the increasing importance of ‘inter-nationalization’ in the 1980s’ and early 1990s, i.e. trade, relations, negotiations and management across nations. This raises the

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<sup>5</sup> I.e. Degrees (BA/MA) in *Langues étrangères appliquées* exist in numerous French universities; *Languages and International Business* or *Business with languages* (*BA/MA* or *BSc/MSc*) exist in the UK (i.e. at the Heriot Whatt University (<https://www.hw.ac.uk/study/uk/undergraduate/international-business-management-and-languages-french-as-main.htm>) (Birmingham University <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/courses/business/international-business-lang.aspx#CourseDetailsTab> and Holland (i.e. Rotterdam University (<https://www.rotterdamuas.com/programmes/bachelor/international-business-and-languages/>); and *Business, Language and Culture* (BSc/MSc) in Denmark (Copenhagen Business School).

question of whether globalization has modified the need for language skills in business and how educational programs can prepare graduates for careers in global workplaces in which simultaneous use and blending of multiple languages are facts of the daily organizational life (Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014; Harzing et al. 2011; Steyaert et al., 2011).

My aim is, therefore, twofold; one is to further our comprehension of how the teaching of cultures and foreign languages is discursively constructed when appended onto traditional business school disciplines. A second aim is to discuss whether and how to adapt the teaching of languages to the new needs of the increasingly multilingual workplaces.

Theoretically, this study will be inspired by critical pedagogy and its encouragement to go beyond the class room teaching and to consider the historical and institutional contexts that contribute in shaping teaching and learning processes within a given educational program (McClaren, 1995; Robertson, 2015; Tietze, 2004). This includes explicit or tacit power relations between disciplines (i.e. 'hidden curriculum', Apple 1990) that have implications for whether and how a subject might be discursively constructed as leading and central for the profile of graduates. In addition, the paper will draw on the socio-linguistic literature on languages in international business (Brannen and Mughan, 2017; Janssens and Steyaert, 2014; Marschan et al. 1997; Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999; Langinier & Erhart, 2015; Lüdi et al., 2013; Sliwa and Johansson, 2014; Steyaert et al., 2011). The aim is to conceive of the skills and competences required for business graduates for integrating and thriving in multilingual and multicultural organizations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014).

Empirically, this is a single case study of one educational program. This research design allows for considering contexts and conditions under which foreign languages and cultures are taught and to further our comprehension of how students, teachers and administrators

discursively construct the aim and the value of this teaching. In addition, this contextually situated design (Doz and Brannen, 2010) also permits consideration of the interplay between a university's educational portfolio, national educational policy and prevailing discourses on cultures and languages in the wider society.

The single case study will consist of the SPRØK-program that was launched as one of the first interdisciplinary programs at Copenhagen Business School (Denmark) in 1984. SPRØK, an acronym for 'language' and 'economy', started as a Bachelor and Master of Arts, taught in Danish and in two foreign languages (English, and either French, German or Spanish). Today, more than thirty years later, SPRØK still exists; however, its structure and its content have changed considerably. SPRØK has been transformed into a BSc and an MSc with the name Business, Language and Culture (BLC). As a consequence, some of its interdisciplinary elements have faded away, leaving more room for business administration and traditional economic disciplines, and less for courses on societal contexts taught in French, German or Spanish. The program has also become English taught to internationalize the student body. Yet, as its title indicates, the BLC program has retained, so far, elements of its genuine interdisciplinary blend of languages and cultures.

The SPRØK-case can further our insight into how languages are taught at the interface of disciplines, on the one hand, and, on the other, which challenges such a program confronts when trying to adapt language teaching to new needs and challenges in global workplaces. In addition, the SPRØK-case also tells the story of how an educational program, which emerged within a business school with a Danish portfolio of education, develops and adapts to the nascent international and research based profile that is today what is recognized as Copenhagen Business School. (Christensen, 2016).

This study will illustrate that while the SPRØK-program responded to business graduates' needs for language and culture skills that emerged with the internationalization of the economy, globalization appeared to some extent to cast doubt on the usefulness of these competences. It would seem, first, that to further our understanding of this apparent paradox we need to take into account the organizational context of CBS as well as the wider societal and institutional context of European business schools in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This will contribute to our understanding of how business disciplines come to be constructed as the leading and dominant competences whereas other languages than English, as well as matters that include cultural awareness and understanding, acquire the status of 'nice-to-have' additional competences. Another element that contributes to our understanding is the Danish educational policy for foreign languages that tend to have prioritized an 'all-English approach' at the expense of the use of several foreign languages in higher education and business.

Second, the presentation and paper will indicate that the SPRØK-program also illustrates challenges in re-conceptualizing what constitute language skills for business graduates in global workplaces. The ideal for foreign language teaching remains, tacitly, that students acquire grammatical correct oral and written proficiency and an appropriate vocabulary within most subject areas. This discursive construction establishes the near-native competence as the measurement of success for the teaching and learning of a foreign language, an ideal that rarely can be attained by SPRØK-students. In this light, teaching foreign languages can only disappoint and appear as wasted resources. In addition, the ideal for near-native competences also makes it difficult to redefine teaching to the characteristics of language use in the multilingual organizational settings, that is, 'hybrid language use' (Steyaert et al. 2011) or 'translanguaging', when social actors cope with language barriers through drawing on multiple linguistic resources

simultaneously in order to get messages through and to make collaborations work (Langinier & Erhart, 2015). In this perspective, any kinds and levels of foreign language skills constitute valuable resources.

To substantiate these two perspectives, the study will be based on empirical material consisting of documents and interviews with various stakeholders from throughout the SPRØK-program's history. In addition, the paper will draw on secondary sources, such as on literature on the CBS and European Business schools (i.e. Blasco and Zølner, 2009; Christensen, 2016; Irwin et al., 2011; Puges, 2011) as well as on the Danish institutional context (i.e. Andersen and Verstraete-Hansen, 2013; Oestergaard, 2012).



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